Food and Agriculture
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United Nations

Mountain demographics and trends

Monitoring changes in the global mountain population: new insights and data

Mountain Partnership

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Mountain demographics and trends

Monitoring changes in the global mountain population: new insights and data

Fabio Parisi, Rosalaura Romeo, Sara Manuelli and Laura Russo,
Mountain Partnership Secretariat

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

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Cover and back cover photograph: A mother and her child at their farm in the mountainous Naryn province of Kyrgyzstan.
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Contents

Acknowledgements v
Executive summary vi
Introduction 1
Key methodological notes 3
Mountains of the world 7
Mountain populations 13
  Distribution by region 15
  Distribution by elevation class 16
  Mountain population trends 18
Rural and urban populations 27
Conclusion 36
References 38
Annex 1 – Country grouping scheme 39

Tables

1. Mountain areas in thousands of km² by region and mountain elevation class 10
2. Mountain population by region in 2025 5
3. Mountain population by region and elevation class in 2025 17
4. Mountain population changes between 2000 and 2030 by region 18
5. Mountain population changes (percentage) between 2000 and 2030 by region 20
6. Global mountain population in 2000, 2005, 2010, 2015, 2020, 2025 and 2030 by elevation class 21
7. Mountain population changes by region and elevation class between 2000 and 2030 (%) 22
8. Mountain population changes between 2020 and 2030 by subregion, in both absolute and percentage values 24
9. Mountain population by rural areas/towns/cities divided by region in 2000, 2020, 2025 and 2030 (percentage) 30
10. Mountain population change by rural areas/towns/cities divided by region between 2000 and 2030 (percentage) 31
11. Mountain population by rural areas/towns/cities divided by region in 2000, 2020, 2025 and 2030 (absolute values) 33
12. Mountain population change by rural areas/towns/cities divided by region between 2000 and 2030 (absolute values) 34

Boxes

1. Definition of mountains....3
2. Regions and subregions....4

Figures

1. Global mountain areas as per the UNEP–WCMC classification....9
2. Distribution of mountains among regions....11
3. Mountain population density and distribution in 2025....14
4. Share of mountain population by region in 2025....15
5. Global mountain population growth between 2000 and 2030....18
6. Mountain population changes (percentage) between 2000 and 2030 by region....20
7. Growth trend of mountain population by elevation class between 2000 and 2030 as a percentage....23
8. Mountain population change by rural areas/towns/cities divided by region between 2000 and 2030 (percentage)....30

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Executive summary

This technical brief presents the most recent assessment of global mountain demographics and trends, offering updated mountain population data and analysing developments between 2000 and 2030. The study provides revised estimates of population growth in mountain areas worldwide, disaggregated by region, elevation class and settlement type – rural areas, towns and semi-dense areas, and cities. It fills a gap in the availability of mountain-specific demographic data aligned with the UNEP-WCMC mountain classification, which is adopted by the Mountain Partnership, the United Nations alliance committed to improving the lives of mountain communities and protecting mountain environments. The last comparable global estimate dates back to 2017; this study updates the analysis using an enhanced regional classification and revised rural–urban definitions.

The brief analyses population distribution in mountain areas for the years 2000, 2005, 2010, 2015, 2020, 2025 and 2030. The findings show that the global mountain population has consistently increased over the study period and is projected to reach 1.24 billion by 2030, up from 888 million in 2000 – an increase of 34 percent over three decades. While this growth remains significant, it is slowing: the rate declined from 20 percent between 2000 and 2015 to 13 percent between 2015 and 2030, in line with global demographic trends. Africa stands out as the region with the fastest-growing mountain population, both in absolute and relative terms, and is expected to account for more than half of the global increase between 2020 and 2030.

Approximately 90 percent of the global mountain population resides below 2 500 metres, largely due to the environmental and socioeconomic challenges of life at higher altitudes. The study also reveals a clear shift in rural–urban dynamics. The share of rural residents in mountain areas is projected to fall from 40 percent in 2000 to 33 percent in 2030. While cities continue to represent the smallest share of the mountain population, they are growing at the fastest rate – from 26 percent in 2000 to 31 percent in 2030 – resulting in a net increase of 157 million people living in mountain cities over the period (from 230 million to 387 million).

These findings highlight a significant demographic transition under way in mountain regions, driven by urbanization and changing settlement patterns. This shift underscores the importance of territorial planning that accounts for both rural and urban areas and considers future trends. More people living in and around fragile mountain ecosystems will demand increased attention and recognition of their vulnerability at global, regional and national scales. Increasing pressure on biodiversity, potential ecosystem degradation, pollution, disruption of traditional agrifood systems, and greater exposure to climate-induced hazards – such as landslides, flash floods, droughts and fires – pose urgent challenges. In response, governments and the international community should prioritize mountain-specific strategies, including investment in climate-resilient infrastructure.

This analysis aims to support evidence-based policymaking and programming in mountain regions and contributes to the implementation of the Five Years of Action for the Development of Mountain Regions (2023–2027), as well as to the 2025 United Nations Secretary-General's report on sustainable mountain development, within the framework of the Mountain Partnership. The findings contribute to the call of the 2025 United Nations Secretary-General's report on sustainable mountain development for improved, disaggregated mountain specific data to inform mountain-specific interventions.

In conclusion, the study provides a demographic baseline to guide future vulnerability and food insecurity assessments. It calls for continued investment in high-resolution, mountain-specific data and encourages researchers, institutions and development partners to build on this foundation. It also encourages policymakers to integrate these insights into inclusive, mountain-specific strategies that promote sustainable mountain development and strengthen the resilience of mountain communities worldwide.

Seven-colour Lake, Karachay-Cherkess Republic, Russian Federation

© Mikhail Zorin

Introduction

Mountains are home to approximately 1.2 billion people, representing 15 percent of the global population. They provide crucial ecosystem services, yet remain highly susceptible to natural hazards and host some of the world's most vulnerable communities. (Thornton *et al*., 2022). As shown in the latest assessment of mountain communities' vulnerability to food insecurity, half of the rural population in mountain areas of developing countries is vulnerable to food insecurity (Romeo *et al*., 2020). Yet mountain areas often receive limited attention in global demographic studies. Given these challenges, there is growing recognition of the need for accurate, spatially disaggregated population data specific to mountain regions.

Mountain regions are experiencing global population growth, urban expansion and migration, which together drive demographic shifts with profound impacts on natural resources, biodiversity, livelihoods and cultures (Jaquet, Kohler and Schwilch, 2019).

Population growth and unplanned settlement expansion increase the already high exposure of mountain communities to climate-induced hazards, such as landslides and flash floods.

As reported in a recent study (Thornton *et al*., 2022), reliable data on human populations living in and near the world's mountains are critical for informed decision-making on environmental protection, disaster response, climate change mitigation and adaptation, and to provide evidence in support of a broader policy dialogue on sustainable development in mountains. Human mobility, especially when linked with pastoralism and labour migration, is a historical feature of many mountain societies and remains vital to their economic and social resilience, further underscoring the importance of accurate and timely demographic data (IOM and Mountain Partnership, 2024).

This technical brief provides an updated baseline for understanding population dynamics in mountain regions. It builds on the demographic analysis presented in the most recent study in the series of assessments on mountain population vulnerability to food insecurity (Romeo *et al*., 2020).[1]

The brief provides updated estimates of mountain population changes from 2000 to 2030, disaggregated by geographical region and elevation class. While the 2020 study analysed data for the years 2000, 2012 and 2017 using an earlier dataset, this new research adopts an improved methodology, including the use of updated global spatial data.[2] It also presents revised estimates of the rural and urban mountain populations, based on the classification system developed by the Global Human Settlement Layer (GHSL).[3]

---

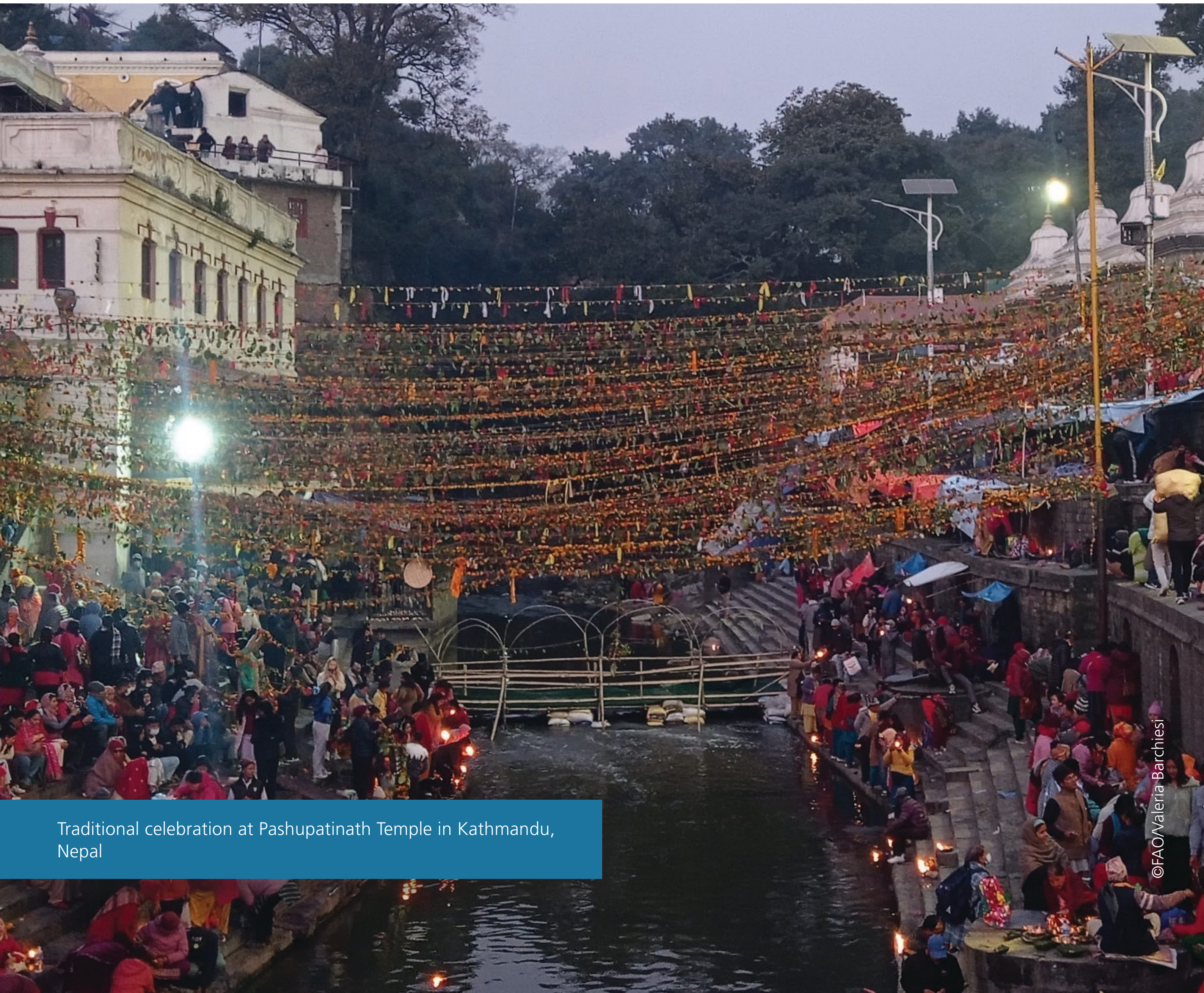
[1] Between 2000 and 2020, FAO developed three assessments of mountain population vulnerability to food insecurity. A key foundation for conducting these assessments has been the understanding and definition of mountain population demographics and trends.

[2] The 2020 study used the LandScan dataset. The present analysis uses the Global Human Settlement Layer (GHS-POP) database, with population data for the years 2000, 2005, 2010, 2015, 2020, 2025 and 2030.

[3] The GHSL is an open and free source of data and tools for assessing the human presence on the planet, jointly developed by the European Union, Copernicus and the Emergency Management Service. See this link for more information: Global Human Settlement - GHSL

This analysis confirms that global and regional population trends observed before 2020 are expected to continue through 2030, with the global mountain population projected to grow steadily, though at a slower pace than in the past. The brief also reconfirms regional disparities identified in earlier publications – Africa is expected to remain the fastest-growing mountain region, while parts of Asia and Europe are projected to experience population decline. Using an improved urban–rural classification, the study further reveals that population growth is now concentrated in cities rather than towns, while the relative share of rural mountain populations is declining across all regions.

Homepage - European Commission. In 2020, the dataset used for assessing urban and rural trends was the e Global Rural–Urban Mapping Project, Version 1 (GRUMP v.1).



Traditional celebration at Pashupatinath Temple in Kathmandu, Nepal

©FAO/Valeria Barchiesi

Traditional houses in Tbilisi, Georgia

©FAO/Sara Manuelli

Key methodological notes

In 2003, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) published a study on the use of spatial information for an in-depth understanding of the causes of poverty and hunger in mountain environments (FAO, 2003). Since then, two more FAO studies have used geographic information system technology for the analysis of spatial data to estimate the world's mountain population and its changes over the years, with the objective of helping to map the vulnerability to food insecurity of mountain communities, especially those living in rural areas of developing countries (Romeo *et al*., 2015; Romeo *et al*., 2020).

This study aims to provide an updated and comprehensive assessment of global mountain population dynamics between 2000 and 2030.

Methodology

The current assessment applies the same mountain definition as in previous studies (see Box 1). However, the regional classification used to disaggregate results has been revised and aligned with the current UN M-49 scheme (see Box 2).

Box 1. Definition of mountains

This study uses the latest United Nations Environment Programme–World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP–WCMC) definition of mountains, which identifies seven classes:

- Class 1, elevation > 4 500 m
- Class 2, elevation 3 500 – 4 500 m
- Class 3, elevation 2 500 – 3 500 m
- Class 4, elevation 1 500 – 2 500 m and slope ≥ 2°
- Class 5, elevation 1 000 – 1 500 m and slope ≥ 5° or local elevation
- range (7 km radius) > 300 m
- Class 6, elevation 300 – 1 000 m and local elevation range (7 km radius) > 300 m
- Class 7, isolated inner basins and plateaus less than 25 km² in extent that are surrounded by mountains but do not themselves meet criteria of classes 1–6 (this seventh class was introduced in the 2002 revision of the original 2000 system).

Source:
Blyth, S., Groombridge, B., Lysenko, I., Miles, L.J., & Newton, A.C. 2002. *Mountain Watch: Environmental Change & Sustainable Development in Mountains* (UNEPWCMC Biodiversity Series No. 12). Cambridge, UK, UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre. ISBN 1899628207.

Box 2. Regions and subregions

Countries have been grouped according to the United Nations Statistics Division 'M.49' standard (presented in Annex I). The M.49 country grouping identifies five regions: Africa, Americas, Asia, Europe and Oceania.

Africa	Eastern Africa
	Middle Africa
	Northern Africa
	Southern Africa
	Western Africa
Americas	Caribbean
	Central America
	Northern America
	South America
Asia	Central Asia
	Eastern Asia
	South-eastern Asia
	Southern Asia
	Western Asia
Europe	Eastern Europe
	Northern Europe
	Southern Europe
	Western Europe
Oceania	Australia and New Zealand
	Melanesia
	Micronesia
	Polynesia

Source:
United Nations Standard country or area codes for statistical use (M49). [Accessed on: 24 April 2025]. https://unstats.un.org/unsd/methodology/m49/

Population data were derived from the Global Human Settlement Layer GHS-POP database for the years 2000, 2005, 2010, 2015, 2020, 2025 and 2030. This spatial raster depicts the distribution of human population,[4] expressed as the number of people per cell (Schiavina *et al.*, 2023; Freire *et al.*, 2016).

The political boundaries used to assign pixels to countries or territories were those of the Global Administrative Unit Layers (GAUL).[5]

Rural areas, towns and semi-dense areas and cities were derived from the GHS Settlement Model layers (GHS-SMOD) GHS-SMOD_GLOBE_R2023A, which delineates and classifies settlement typologies (Carneiro Freire *et al.*, 2016).

---

[4] The spatial resolution used for this analysis was 0.0083333333 degrees x 0.0083333333 degrees per pixel.

[5] For more information on the GAUL dataset, see: https://www.fao.org/hih-geospatial-platform/news/detail/now-available--the-global-administrative-unit-layers-(gaul)-dataset---2024-edition/en

The pixels were then classified based on the GHS Degree of Urbanization Classification (GHS-DUC) GHS-DUC_GLOBE_R2023A and by using the Territorial units classification Level 1 (Eurostat, 2021).

- According to this classification, the three classes are defined as follows:
- **Cities (or densely populated areas):** local units that have at least 50 percent of their population in urban centres.
- **Towns and semi-dense areas (or intermediate density areas):** local units that have less than 50 percent of their population in urban centres and no more than 50 percent of their population in rural grid cells.
- **Rural areas (or thinly populated areas):** local units that have more than 50 percent of their population in rural grid cells.
- **Urban areas** consist of cities plus towns and semi-dense areas.

Both GHS-POP and GHS-SMOD datasets are part of the broader GSHL Data Package publicly released in 2023 by the JRC Scientific Information System and Databases Report. For the years 2000 to 2020, population estimates are derived from observed data using satellite imagery and census-based modeling. In contrast, data for 2025 and 2030 are projections based on the spatial disaggregation of national-level forecasts (Schiavina *et al.*, 2023).

Throughout the text, tables display values in black and red: red indicates negative values, while black indicates positive values.

The present analysis includes a few methodological changes and limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results.

Unlike the 2020 vulnerability study,[6] which distinguished between developed and developing countries, this assessment follows the United Nations M49 classification system, grouping countries into global regions, subregions and intermediate regions, without reflecting development status.

Additionally, due to the nature and resolution of the input data, mountain population estimates carry an intrinsic margin of error and are not reliable for detailed, localized analysis.

Finally, it is important to note that the study does not attempt to explain the underlying causes of population changes in mountain areas; rather, it provides a descriptive overview of the population distribution across different regions, elevation classes and urban classifications at different time periods.

---

[6] The study 'Vulnerability of mountain peoples to food insecurity' is available here: https://openknowledge.fao.org/items/f532302b-058e-4939-bf19-5803074a3449

Hidden village in Doti, Nepal

1

Mountains of the world

©Sambat Ranabhat

Village of Lubnice, nestled in the mountains of northern Montenegro

©EBRD/FAO Dermot Doorly

Mountains cover 39 million km² – approximately 27 percent of the Earth's surface. Figure 1 illustrates the global distribution of mountain areas by elevation class, as defined using the classification applied in this study.

Table 1 presents the extent of mountain areas, in square kilometres, disaggregated by elevation class and geographical grouping.

Figure 2 provides a visual representation of how the global mountain area is distributed among regions.[7]

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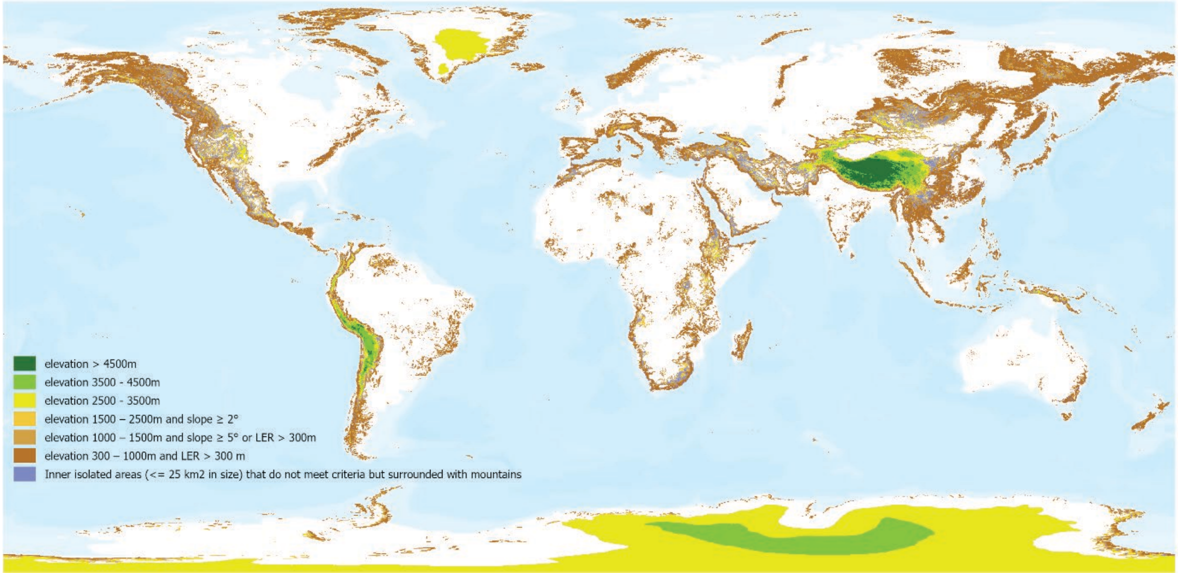
[7] The data are available in Table 1, under column 'Global distribution of mountains (%)'.

Figure 1. Global mountain areas as per the UNEP–WCMC classification


elevation > 4500m
elevation 3500 - 4500m
elevation 2500 - 3500m
elevation 1500 – 2500m and slope ≥ 2°
elevation 1000 – 1500m and slope ≥ 5° or LER > 300m
elevation 300 – 1000m and LER > 300 m
Inner isolated areas (<= 25 km2 in size) that do not meet criteria but surrounded with mountains

Notes:
Refer to the disclaimer on page ii for the names and boundaries used in this map.

Source:
UNEP-WCMC. (2002). Mountains of the World. Cambridge (UK): UNEP-WCMC. https://doi.org/10.34892/4wep-p033; further web resources available at https://resources.unep-wcmc.org/products/9613e454c5b54b2b85627ca6c8a658d5 [22 April 2025].

Traditional houses in Paro, Bhutan

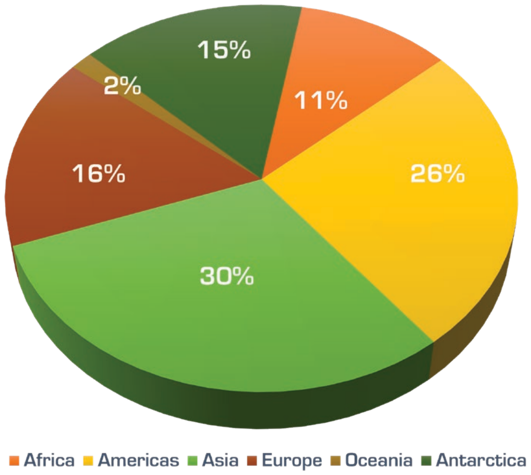
©Giorgio Grussu

Table 1. Mountain areas in thousands of km^2 by region and mountain elevation class

Region	Mountain areas (km^2)										
	Class 1	Class 2	Class 3	Class 4	Class 5	Class 6	Class 7	Lowlands	Total mountains	Mountains over land area (%)	Global distribution of mountains (%)
Africa	**91**	**5 044**	**100 275**	**606 303**	**1 294 354**	**2 078 710**	**95 412**	**25 684 028**	**4 180 190**	**14.00**	**10.72**
Eastern Africa	87	4 816	76 799	343 423	593 333	794 735	39 736	5 148 514	1 852 929	26.46	4.75
Middle Africa	4	120	6 237	83 682	209 147	354 120	12 550	5 892 951	665 860	10.15	1.71
Northern Africa	-	108	6 776	61 068	207 524	483 521	16 598	6 816 783	775 595	10.22	1.99
Southern Africa	-	-	10 447	116 271	264 395	273 314	25 033	1 980 645	689 460	25.82	1.77
Western Africa		-	17	1 859	19 955	173 020	1 495	5 845 135	196 346	3.25	0.50
Americas	**156 482**	**592 589**	**1 120 991**	**1 917 100**	**2 033 905**	**4 046 087**	**201 835**	**31 720 393**	**10 068 989**	**24.09**	**25.81**
Caribbean	-	-	36	2 756	5 526	38 673	450	183 204	47 440	20.57	0.12
Central America	41	1 049	67 095	362 941	295 219	445 957	42 489	1 252 686	1 214 791	49.23	3.11
Northern America	193	11 889	685 792	1 120 816	1 221 706	2 236 570	125 516	15 954 686	5 402 482	25.30	13.85
South America	156 247	579 651	368 068	430 586	511 454	1 324 887	33 382	14 329 817	3 404 276	19.20	8.73
Asia	**1 508 224**	**921 067**	**1 040 687**	**2 013 269**	**2 114 850**	**3 937 922**	**249 904**	**19 454 023**	**11 785 924**	**37.73**	**30.22**
Central Asia	27 634	91 733	110 369	117 649	93 952	167 190	6 255	3 572 184	614 782	14.68	1.58
Eastern Asia	1 407 638	739 933	625 940	906 866	841 941	1 496 820	122 434	5 400 637	6 141 570	53.21	15.75
South-Eastern Asia	548	6 086	23 770	113 171	300 325	1 094 113	18 526	2 901 152	1 556 540	34.92	3.99
Southern Asia	72 376	82 620	238 976	588 627	491 292	681 337	63 469	4 241 338	2 218 697	34.34	5.69
Western Asia	29	695	41 632	286 956	387 340	498 462	39 220	3 338 711	1 254 335	27.31	3.22
Europe	**39**	**1 447**	**45 232**	**453 308**	**1 257 117**	**4 456 834**	**77 755**	**16 661 278**	**6 291 732**	**27.41**	**16.13**
Eastern Europe	38	1 220	31 637	357 868	1 006 792	3 478 618	60 957	13 786 018	4 937 131	26.37	12.66
Northern Europe	-	-	-	6 209	60 242	333 991	4 501	1 407 144	404 942	22.35	1.04
Southern Europe	-	71	4 657	49 487	142 746	471 125	9 688	639 325	677 774	51.46	1.74
Western Europe	1	155	8 938	39 744	47 338	173 100	2 609	828 791	271 884	24.70	0.70
Oceania	**-**	**671**	**18 019**	**55 176**	**80 703**	**449 929**	**9 532**	**7 896 199**	**614 030**	**7.22**	**1.57**
Australia and New Zealand	-	-	41	8 688	49 903	321 288	5 172	7 573 559	385 092	4.84	0.99
Melanesia	-	671	17 978	46 441	30 572	126 464	4 341	313 129	226 468	41.97	0.58
Micronesia	-	-	-	-	-	117	1	3 403	118	3.34	0.00
Polynesia	-	-	-	47	228	2 060	17	6 108	2 352	27.80	0.01
Antarctica	**17**	**1 114 554**	**4 508 126**	**119 568**	**120 081**	**196 167**	**5 625**	**6 473 828**	**6 064 138**	**48.37**	**15.55**
World	**1 664 853**	**2 635 372**	**6 833 330**	**5 164 724**	**6 901 009**	**15 165 650**	**640 064**	**107 889 749**	**39 005 002**	**26.55**	**100.00**

Source: Author’s own elaboration.

Figure 2. Distribution of mountains among regions



Source: Author’s own elaboration.

As illustrated in Figure 2, Asia hosts 30 percent of the world’s total mountain area, followed by the Americas (26 percent), Europe (16 percent), Antarctica (15 percent), Africa (11 percent) and Oceania (2 percent).

When considering only the highest elevation class (class 1, above 4 500 metres), the distribution is even more concentrated: 91 percent of the global mountain area in this class is located in Asia (see Table 1).

Expedition to the Tupungato volcano, Southern Andes, Chile

2

Mountain populations

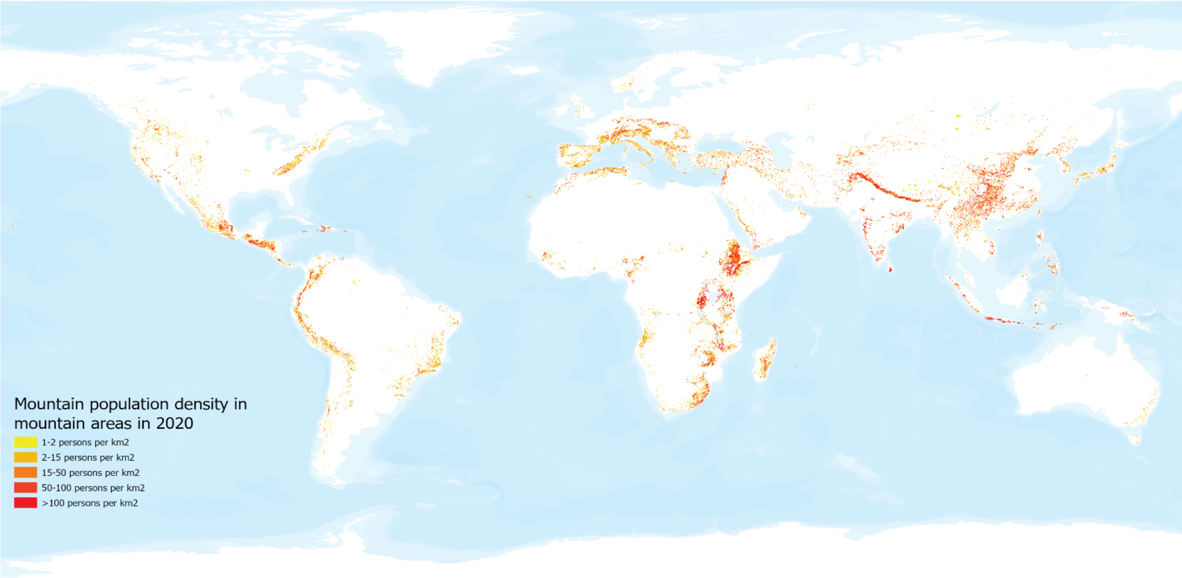
© Brittany Mumma

KyrgyzJailoo-kindergartens for children of nomadic herding families

©Kuluipa Akmatova

As of 2025, the world's mountain population amounted to 1.2 billion, representing 15 percent of the global population (see Table 2).

Figure 3. Mountain population density and distribution in 2025


Mountain population density in mountain areas in 2020
1-2 persons per km2
2-15 persons per km2
15-50 persons per km2
50-100 persons per km2
>100 persons per km2

Notes:
Refer to the disclaimer on page ii for the names and boundaries used in this map.

Source: UNEP-WCMC. (2002). Mountains of the World. Cambridge (UK): UNEP-WCMC. https://doi.org/10.34892/4wep-p033; further web resources available at https://resources.unep-wcmc.org/products/9613e454c5b54b2b85627ca6c8a658d5

European Commission, Joint Research Centre (JRC) (2015): GHS-POP R2015A - GHS population grid, derived from GPW4, multitemporal (1975, 1990, 2000, 2015) - OBSOLETE RELEASE. European Commission, Joint Research Centre (JRC) [Dataset] PID: http://data.europa.eu/89h/jrc-ghsl-ghs_pop_gpw4_globe_r2015a [24 July 2025].[8]

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[8] For more information about the datasets used to generate this map, see the chapter 'Key methodological notes'.

2.1 Distribution by region

In 2025, the mountains of Asia hosted more than half (51 percent) of the total mountain population, or 603 million people. African mountains were the second most populated, with 301 million people in 2025, accounting for 26 percent of the total mountain population.

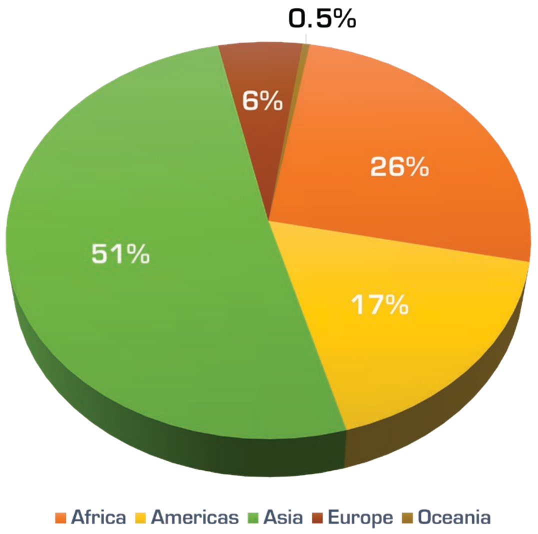
Out of the ten countries with the largest mountain populations size, seven were in Asia (China, India, Indonesia, Iran, Türkiye, Pakistan and Afghanistan), one was in Africa (Ethiopia) and two were in the Americas (Mexico, Colombia).[9]

Table 2. Mountain population by region in 2025

Region	Number of Mountain Population	Percentage of total mountain population
Africa	301 790 985	26
Americas	205 251 143	17
Asia	603 067 973	51
Europe	67 212 247	6
Oceania	5 688 738	0.5
World	1 183 011 086	100

Source: Author's own elaboration.

Figure 4. Share of mountain population by region in 2025



Source: Author's own elaboration.

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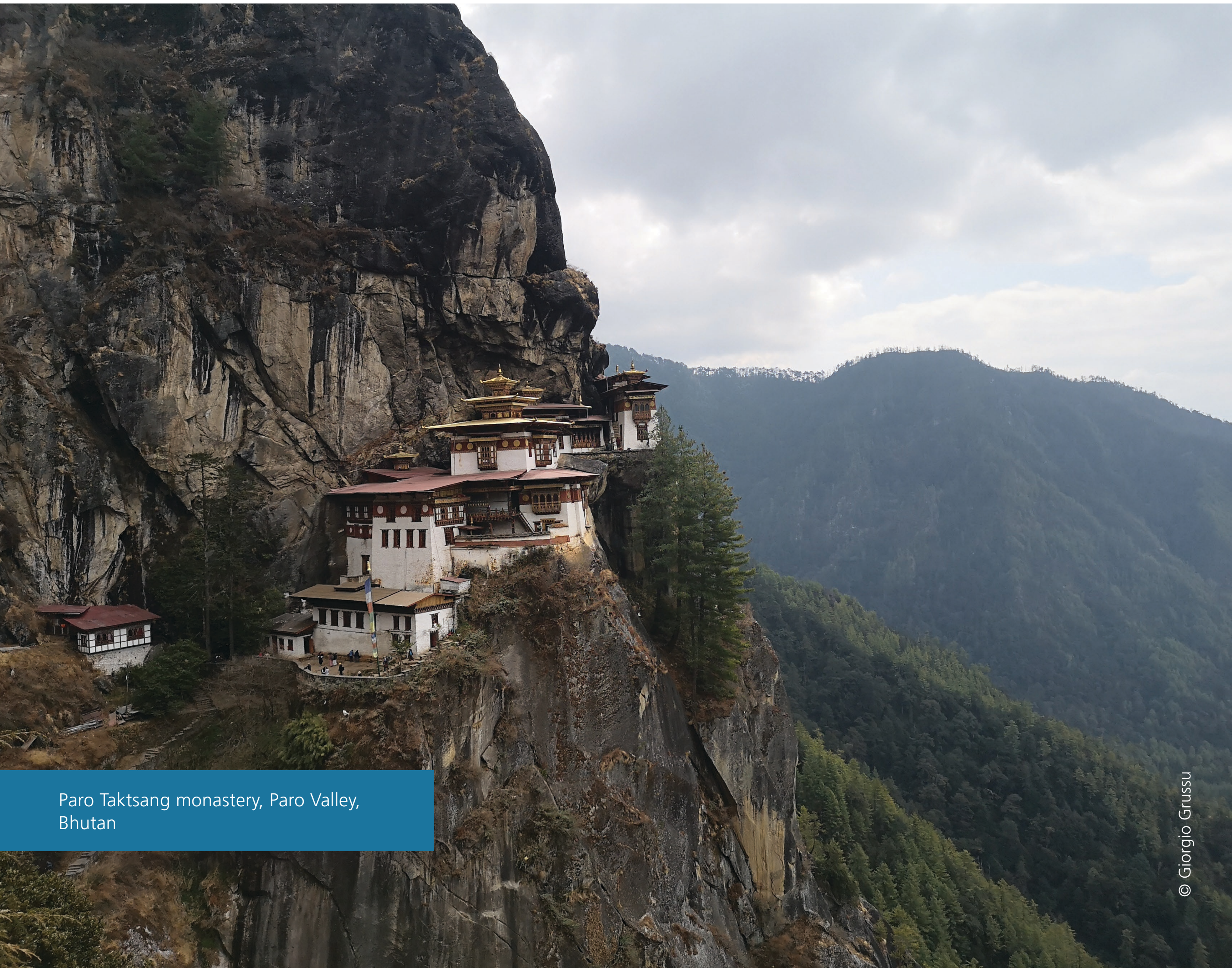
[9] Countries are listed in descending order of mountain population size within each region.

2.2 Distribution by elevation class

This section examines the most recently available data on mountain population distribution, referring to the year 2025. Table 3 contains data on mountain populations divided by regional grouping and elevation class.

The vast majority of the world's mountain population – 1 068 million people (or 90 percent of the total mountain population) – lives in areas below 2 500 m (classes 4, 5 and 6). This is partly due to the harsh conditions and difficulties of living at altitudes higher than 2 500 m. At higher altitudes, the distribution varies considerably among regions: almost half of the total mountain population living in elevation classes 1, 2 and 3 is found in the Americas (36 million people), while 81 percent of the approximatively 1 million people living above 4 500 m are found in Asia (see Table 3).



Paro Taktsang monastery, Paro Valley, Bhutan

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Table 3. Mountain population by region and elevation class in 2025

2025 mountain population												
Region	**Class 1**	**Class 2**	**Class 3**	**Class 4**	**Class 5**	**Class 6**	**Class 7**	**Lowlands**	**Total mountains**	**Total population**	**Mountain population as percentage of total population**	**Proportion of mountain population by region (as percentage of global total)**
Africa	48	204 281	23 342 198	90 080 087	78 117 690	98 595 643	11 451 037	1 224 546 521	301 790 985	1 526 337 506	19.77%	25.51%
Eastern Africa	48	204 150	22 968 436	76 106 498	52 015 396	32 812 417	8 457 167	316 223 592	192 564 112	508 787 704	37.85%	16.28%
Middle Africa	-	4	259 152	8 432 217	11 387 483	17 096 050	1 159 866	175 881 782	38 334 772	214 216 554	17.90%	3.24%
Northern Africa	-	127	19 867	761 432	5 450 989	23 950 445	628 323	241 114 924	30 811 183	271 926 107	11.33%	2.60%
Southern Africa	-	-	94 026	4 714 207	7 923 509	10 434 021	1 119 224	46 400 868	24 284 987	70 685 855	34.36%	2.05%
Western Africa	-	-	717	65 734	1 340 313	14 302 710	86 458	444 925 355	15 795 930	460 721 285	3.43%	1.34%
Americas	201 432	8 121 557	28 044 261	36 761 159	36 193 544	91 440 761	4 488 429	847 198 246	205 251 143	1 052 449 389	19.50%	17.35%
Caribbean	-	-	104	93 620	329 511	4 266 809	58 135	39 311 803	4 748 179	44 059 982	10.78%	0.40%
Central America	-	8 063	8 078 342	22 515 065	19 287 199	27 151 069	2 713 699	103 382 770	79 753 438	183 136 208	43.55%	6.74%
Northern America	-	355	164 587	1 518 992	4 534 402	14 778 533	408 724	360 094 075	21 405 593	381 499 668	5.61%	1.81%
South America	201 432	8 113 138	19 801 228	12 633 481	12 042 433	45 244 350	1 307 871	344 409 598	99 343 933	443 753 531	22.39%	8.40%
Asia	842 645	3 909 560	11 653 582	80 839 720	136 375 633	348 445 838	21 000 996	4 157 997 343	603 067 973	4 761 065 316	12.67%	50.98%
Central Asia	2 420	71 359	117 849	1 452 117	4 145 353	14 190 185	223 847	60 201 054	20 203 130	80 404 184	25.13%	1.71%
Eastern Asia	793 347	3 663 781	5 666 969	33 591 281	47 131 800	144 216 579	13 465 585	1 398 213 886	248 529 341	1 646 743 227	15.09%	21.01%
South-Eastern Asia	1 616	36 578	555 807	3 182 505	11 015 871	62 583 368	1 118 975	607 177 782	78 494 719	685 672 501	11.45%	6.64%
Southern Asia	45 263	137 712	3 596 203	29 598 425	52 936 974	74 372 270	3 714 236	1 881 454 431	164 401 083	2 045 855 514	8.04%	13.90%
Western Asia	-	130	1 716 755	13 015 391	21 145 635	53 083 436	2 478 352	210 950 191	91 439 699	302 389 891	30.24%	7.73%
Europe	8	101	11 917	697 248	2 855 069	62 547 556	1 100 349	668 507 270	67 212 247	735 719 517	9.14%	5.68%
Eastern Europe	8	45	3 375	291 091	720 042	17 922 470	271 024	266 728 345	19 208 054	285 936 400	6.72%	1.62%
Northern Europe	-	-	-	2 397	12 364	492 412	16 580	105 261 751	523 754	105 785 504	0.50%	0.04%
Southern Europe	-	1	474	122 809	1 177 389	23 621 639	507 275	122 767 695	25 429 586	148 197 282	17.16%	2.15%
Western Europe	-	55	8 069	280 952	945 274	20 511 035	305 469	173 749 478	22 050 853	195 800 331	11.26%	1.86%
Oceania	-	530	353 122	3 057 913	704 168	1 368 776	204 228	39 339 254	5 688 738	45 027 992	12.63%	0.48%
Australia and New Zealand	-	-	-	670	11 160	546 128	8 507	31 216 778	566 465	31 783 243	1.78%	0.05%
Melanesia	-	530	353 122	3 057 243	692 959	807 281	195 708	7 103 236	5 106 843	12 210 079	41.82%	0.43%
Micronesia	-	-	-	-	-	79	-	405 796	79	405 875	0.02%	0.00%
Polynesia	-	-	-	-	49	15 288	14	613 443	15 351	628 795	2.44%	0.00%
World	1 044 133	12 236 029	63 405 081	211 436 126	254 246 104	602 398 574	38 245 039	6 937 588 634	1 183 011 086	8 120 599 719	14.57%	100.00%

Source: Author’s own elaboration.

2.3 Mountain population trends

2.3.1 Global mountain population trends

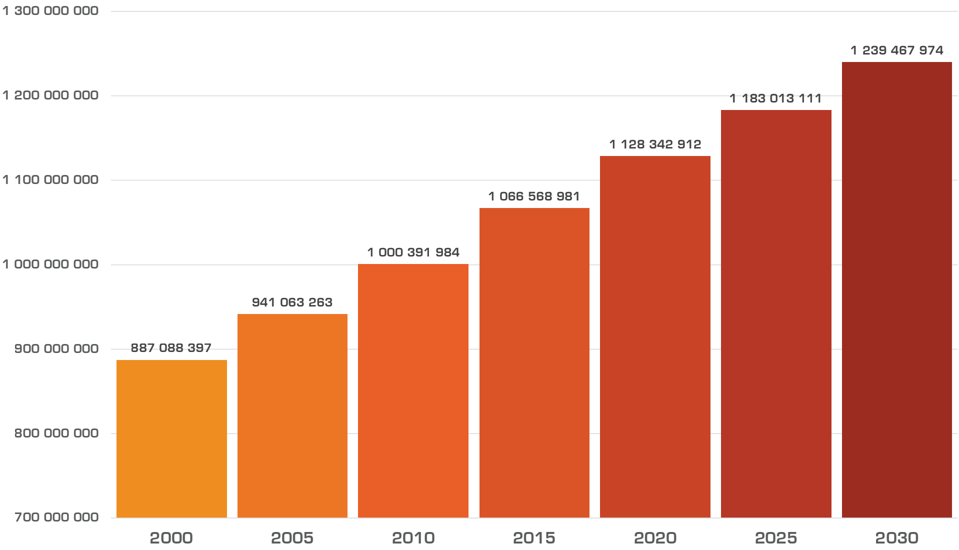
From 2000 to 2025, the world's mountain population increased from 890 million to 1.2 billion people and is projected to reach 1.24 billion in 2030 (see Table 4 and Figure 5). The share of the mountain population as a proportion of the global population from 2000 to 2025 remained stable (around 15 percent of the world population) and is estimated to stay at that level from now until 2030.

Table 4. Mountain population changes between 2000 and 2030 by region

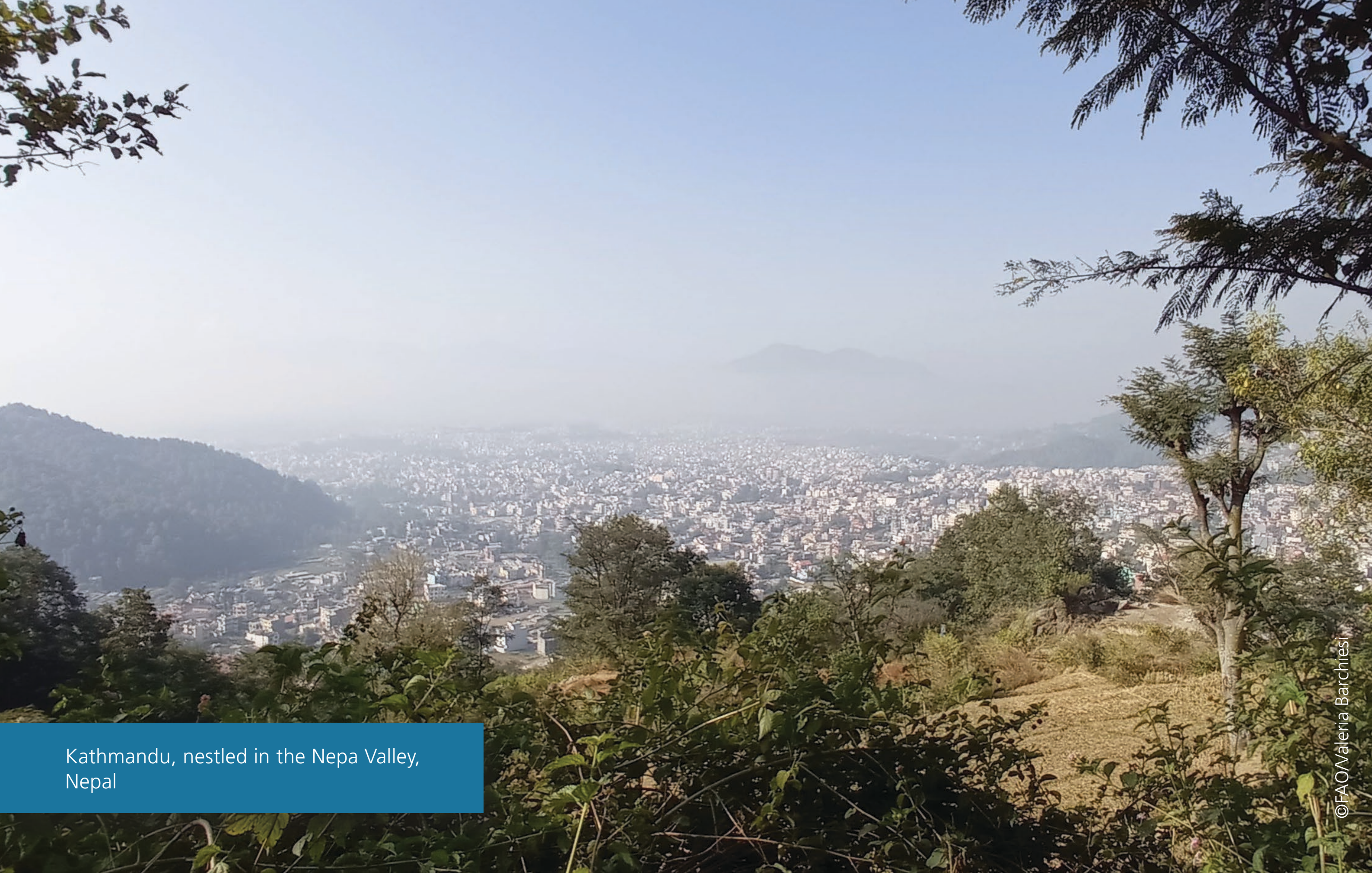
Reference year	Global mountain population by region Regions						Global mountain population as percentage of total population
	Africa	Americas	Asia	Europe	Oceania	World	
2000	173 312 957	156 028 650	487 373 212	67 533 743	2 837 834	887 088 397	14.55%
2005	193 021 471	167 306 360	509 338 777	68 048 606	3 346 045	941 061 258	14.48%
2010	216 198 661	177 480 446	534 053 978	68 726 277	3 930 612	1 000 389 974	14.45%
2015	242 630 932	187 683 324	563 213 006	68 496 809	4 542 895	1 066 566 966	14.49%
2020	271 417 086	197 813 067	586 089 205	67 891 620	5 129 915	1 128 340 892	14.52%
2025	301 790 985	205 251 143	603 067 973	67 212 247	5 688 738	1 183 011 086	14.57%
2030	333 115 351	212 634 973	621 122 479	66 369 199	6 223 942	1 239 465 944	14.63%

Source: Author's own elaboration.

Figure 5. Global mountain population growth between 2000 and 2030



Source: Author's own elaboration.



Kathmandu, nestled in the Nepa Valley, Nepal

©FAO/Valeria Barchiesi

2.3.2 Mountain population trends by region

From 2000 to 2025, all regions saw an increase in mountain population, with the exception of Europe, which saw a slight decrease (see Table 4). Africa had the greatest change in both absolute and percentage values, with an increased mountain population of 128 million (74 percent). In Asia, the mountain population increased by 115 million people (24 percent); in the Americas it rose by 49 million (32 percent) and in Oceania the mountain population doubled (100 percent change, with an increase of 2.8 million people). With the exception of Europe and Oceania, changes in the mountain population mirrored the overall population growth trends in each respective region – that is the combined population changes in both mountain and non-mountain areas.[10]

Estimates for 2030 indicate that Asia will continue to have the highest mountain population, both in absolute (621 million people) and percentage terms (50 percent). However, more than half of the projected 111 million increase in the global mountain population will occur in Africa (62 million people more than in 2020), with 333 million people (27 percent of the world's mountain population) projected to live in the continent in 2030. Given these trends, the regional distribution of the mountain population is expected to shift, with Africa increasing its share of the global mountain population and Asia's share decreasing.

Despite African mountain areas experiencing the fastest population growth rates among global mountain regions, population growth in African lowlands is occurring at an even faster pace. This trend is reflected in the declining share of mountain populations relative to the region's total population.

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[10] Global population change from 2000 to 2025 was: Africa 86 percent, Asia 28 percent, Americas 26 percent, Europe 2 percent and Oceania 50 percent.

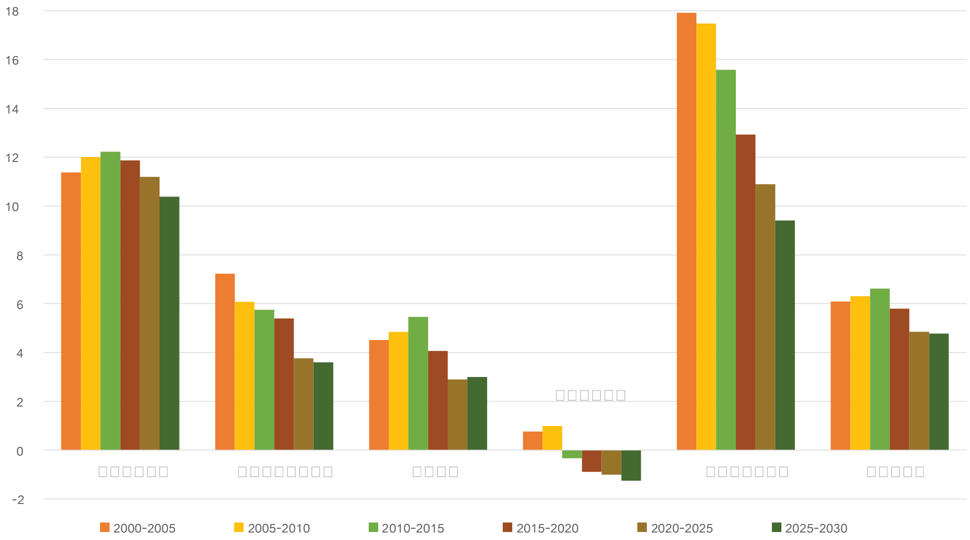
Eastern Asia, Southern Europe and Eastern Europe are the only three subregions with a projected decrease of the mountain population, with 6.5 million, 1.5 million and 400 000 fewer people expected to live in mountain areas from 2020 to 2030, respectively. The total population in the subregions (mountains and lowlands) is also projected to decline (15 million fewer people in Eastern Asia, 4 million fewer people in Southern Europe and 10 fewer million people in Eastern Europe, from 2020 to 2030) (see Table 4).

Table 5. Mountain population changes (percentage) between 2000 and 2030 by region

Increase of mountain population by region (percentage)						
	Regions					
Timeline	**Africa**	**Americas**	**Asia**	**Europe**	**Oceania**	**World**
2000-2005	11.37	7.23	4.51	0.76	17.91	6.08
2005-2010	12.01	6.08	4.85	1.00	17.47	6.30
2010-2015	12.23	5.75	5.46	0.33	15.58	6.62
2015-2020	11.86	5.40	4.06	0.88	12.92	5.79
2020-2025	11.19	3.76	2.90	1.00	10.89	4.85
2025-2030	10.38	3.60	2.99	1.25	9.41	4.77

Source: Author's own elaboration.

Figure 6. Mountain population changes (percentage) between 2000 and 2030 by region



Source: Author's own elaboration.

2.3.4 Mountain population trends by elevation

Worldwide, from 2000 to 2025, the distribution of the mountain population remained stable for almost every elevation class. The percentage of the mountain population living at the highest altitudes – above 3 500 m (mountain classes 1 and 2) – as a proportion of the total mountain population decreased (see Table 6).

Lower altitudes (mountain classes 3, 4 and 5) experienced an increase in the share of mountain population, while class 6 experienced a decrease of 3 percentage points (from 54 to 51 percent) of the total mountain population throughout the period 2000 to 2025. The largest increases were observed in classes 3 and 4, where the mountain population grew by 54 percent and 50 percent respectively between 2000 and 2025 (see Table 7).

Although the increase in the mountain population in absolute values is relatively small – from 49 257 in 2000 to 229 399 in 2030 – the 366 percent growth observed in Africa's class 2 stands out as a clear outlier compared with all other population changes (see Table 7).

Table 6. Global mountain population in 2000, 2005, 2010, 2015, 2020, 2025 and 2030 by elevation class

Reference year	Elevation class							
	Class 1	Class 2	Class 3	Class 4	Class 5	Class 6	Class 7	Total
2000	857 628	9 829 105	41 279 551	140 537 293	183 758 025	480 659 966	30 164 829	887 088 397
2005	900 367	10 294 415	45 324 502	152 556 599	196 849 457	503 343 897	31 792 022	941 063 263
2010	960 069	10 750 577	49 654 030	166 105 840	211 034 744	528 254 467	33 630 247	1 000 391 984
2015	1 007 527	11 237 744	54 272 145	180 981 175	226 687 364	556 893 653	35 487 358	1 066 568 981
2020	1 033 471	11 873 291	59 153 807	197 217 426	240 777 935	581 375 387	36 909 575	1 128 342 912
2025	1 044 133	12 236 029	63 405 081	211 436 126	254 246 104	602 398 574	38 245 039	1 183 013 111
2030	1 067 406	12 669 809	67 320 447	226 322 946	268 488 066	623 908 971	39 688 298	1 239 467 974

Source: Author's own elaboration.

Arco de Santa Catalina, La Antigua, Guatemala

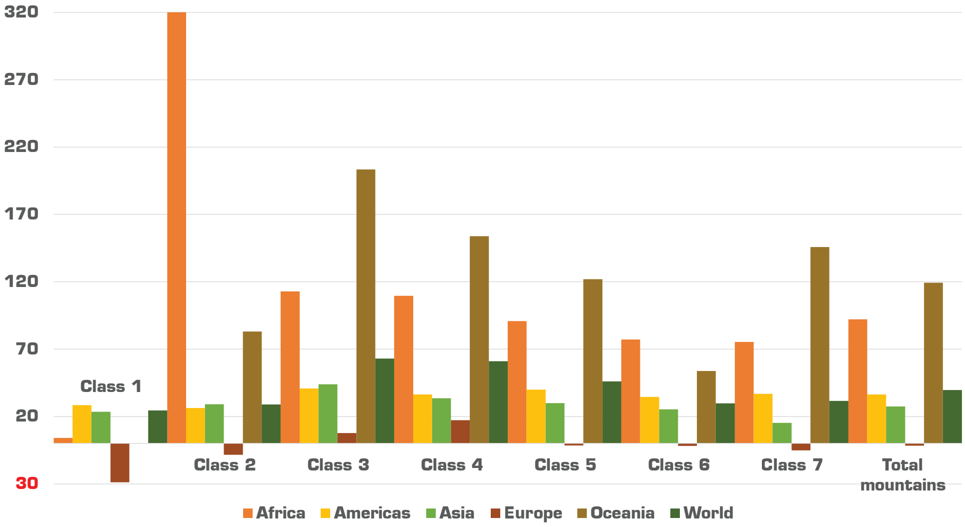
©CharlieQuezada-CoheteStudio

Table 7. Mountain population changes by region and elevation class between 2000 and 2030 (%)

Region	Elevation classes							Total mountain population (all classes)
	Class 1	Class 2	Class 3	Class 4	Class 5	Class 6	Class 7	
Africa	4.02	365.71	112.93	109.66	90.89	77.18	75.28	92.20
Eastern Africa	4.02	366.30	113.34	117.41	110.60	121.33	87.90	114.37
Middle Africa	-	71.23	120.01	106.21	96.75	137.79	86.89	115.77
Northern Africa	-	47.02	47.83	37.53	50.56	38.38	28.14	40.16
Southern Africa	-	-	46.75	40.28	24.13	8.61	25.00	19.65
Western Africa	-	-	47.51	61.58	98.98	93.92	81.16	94.09
Americas	28.48	26.30	40.75	36.29	39.96	34.50	36.91	36.28
Caribbean	-	-	739.19	57.91	27.56	35.28	27.79	35.00
Central America	-	62.26	52.03	45.28	52.57	41.76	49.31	46.53
Northern America	-	23.88	22.75	31.24	45.95	31.49	23.82	34.09
South America	28.48	26.27	36.71	22.71	22.13	31.33	19.96	29.43
Asia	23.50	29.18	43.97	33.58	29.97	25.41	15.37	27.44
Central Asia	17.51	23.43	27.89	76.75	72.45	71.79	57.11	71.53
Eastern Asia	23.03	28.91	14.16	4.78	2.20	0.36	2.12	1.83
South-Eastern Asia	173.65	891.46	802.30	199.33	53.07	36.91	61.38	44.11
Southern Asia	29.22	6.56	59.94	51.65	53.49	47.06	65.71	50.52
Western Asia	-	59.04	96.11	68.31	37.65	68.25	61.69	60.43
Europe	28.80	8.36	7.67	17.28	1.52	1.86	5.04	1.72
Eastern Europe	28.80	5.12	42.17	41.33	18.24	5.65	7.43	4.40
Northern Europe	-	-	-	14.82	6.11	4.70	3.37	4.26
Southern Europe	-	5.75	11.64	0.79	16.95	9.33	10.32	9.69
Western Europe	-	18.10	2.76	6.37	8.40	12.07	6.94	11.75
Oceania	-	83.14	203.41	153.82	121.96	53.77	145.83	119.32
Australia and New Zealand	-	-	-	10.77	5.94	22.11	12.06	21.62
Melanesia	-	50.99	86.83	76.43	67.48	49.84	76.77	71.51
Micronesia	-	-	-	-	-	88.48	-	88.48
Polynesia	-	-	-	-	21.44	21.60	28.90	21.46
World	24.46	28.90	63.08	61.04	46.11	29.80	31.57	39.72

Source: Author's own elaboration.

Figure 7. Growth trend of mountain population by elevation class between 2000 and 2030 as a percentage



Source: Author's own elaboration.

A small village sits on the flank of the Adrar Siroua, Morocco

©Abdellah Azizi

Table 8. Mountain population changes between 2020 and 2030 by subregion, in both absolute and percentage values

Mountain population changes between 2020 and 2030		
Region	**Absolute value**	**Percentage value**
Africa	61 698 265	22.73
Eastern Africa	44 743 123	26.22
Middle Africa	9 353 623	27.68
Northern Africa	3 083 254	10.59
Southern Africa	1 470 537	6.24
Western Africa	3 047 727	21.36
Americas	14 821 906	7.49
Caribbean	467 334	10.37
Central America	7 114 588	9.34
Northern America	1 181 207	5.69
South America	6 058 777	6.29
Asia	35 033 274	5.98
Central Asia	3 256 078	17.60
Eastern Asia	6 541 585	2.59
South-Eastern Asia	7 090 142	9.46
Southern Asia	19 167 106	12.39
Western Asia	12 061 533	14.09
Europe	1 522 421	2.24
Eastern Europe	393 248	2.03
Northern Europe	7 425	1.43
Southern Europe	1 508 993	5.76
Western Europe	372 395	1.71
Oceania	1 094 028	21.33
Australia and New Zealand	30 044	5.46
Melanesia	1 062 342	23.27
Micronesia	11	12.79
Polynesia	1 652	11.27
World	111 125 052	9.85

Source: Author's own elaboration.

Alpaca farmer works with his herd, Tolconi village, Peru

©Petra Dilthey

Village in the Talesh highlands, Iran

© Sajad Harati

3

Rural and urban populations

Belluno, located in the Veneto region, Italy

© FAO/Michelle Geringer

The distribution of the global mountain population in the period 2000 to 2030 shows a shift in the size of the rural mountain population, which at the beginning of the century accounted for 40 percent (approximately 357 million people) of the total mountain population, to 33 percent in 2030 (approximately 406 million people). This decreasing trend is common, albeit at a different pace, to all regions of the world (see Table 9).

The proportion of the global mountain population located in towns and semi-dense areas remains stable over the period, growing slightly from 34 percent in 2000, stabilizing at 35 percent in 2025, and projected to reach 36 percent in 2030 (see Table 9). In absolute terms, the total mountain population in towns and semi-dense areas increases from 301 million in 2000 to 446 million in 2030, making this the largest of the three settlement types in absolute numbers by 2030 (see Table 11).

Cities represent the smallest share of the mountain population, albeit steadily increasing from 26 percent in 2000 to 30 percent in 2025. In 2030, cities are projected to represent 31 percent of the total mountain population, equal to the share of the rural mountain population. At the global level, this is the fastest growing category (see Table 9). This shift is also evident in absolute terms: the urban mountain population is expected to rise from 230 million in 2000 to 387 million in 2030, representing the largest absolute increase among all settlement types, despite starting as the smallest category (see Table 11).

The same pattern is seen in African mountains, where the rural mountain population accounted for 45 percent of the region's total mountain population in 2000 and is expected to progressively decrease to 33 percent by 2030. In contrast, the share of the mountain population living in towns and semi-dense areas is expected to increase from 33 percent in 2000 to 42 percent in 2030 (see Table 9). The percentage of the mountain population living in cities remains relatively stable in Africa, increasing from 22 percent to 24 percent during the 30 years from 2000 to 2030. The fastest growing category is towns and semi-dense areas (see Table 9).

In Asia, the rural mountain population accounted for 39 percent of the region's total mountain population in 2000 and is projected to decline to 32 percent by 2030. The mountain population living in towns and semi-dense areas is expected to remain stable at around 37 percent over the analysed period, while the mountain population living in cities is expected to grow progressively from 24 percent in 2000 to 32 percent by 2030 (see Table 9).

In the Americas, the majority of the mountain population is concentrated in cities, growing from 41 percent in 2000 to 47 percent in 2030. Towns and semi-dense areas remain stable over the period, at 24 percent, while the rural population decreases from 35 percent in 2000 to 29 percent in 2030 (see Table 9).

In Europe, the distribution of the mountain population in the three categories remains practically unchanged over the period under consideration. The rural population is predominant, at around 50 percent of the region's total mountain population and decreases slightly from 2000 (53 percent), stabilizing in 2025 and 2030 (at 50 percent). Towns and semi-dense areas represent about 35 percent of the mountain population, while cities range from 14 percent in 2000 to 16 percent in 2025 and 2030, respectively (see Table 9). Cities are the only class projected to experience a minor increase in mountain population (from 9 364 395 to 10 598 345) over the period 2000 to 2030 (see Table 12).

In Oceania, the rural mountain population is the largest at the beginning of the century but shows a rapid decrease, from 78 percent in 2000 to 52 percent in 2025 and 49 percent 2030. This is compensated by a rapid increase in the mountain population of towns and semi-dense areas, from 18 percent in 2000 to 39 percent in 2025 and projected to reach 41 percent in 2030. Cities represent a very small share of the region's total mountain population, but this share is expected to increase steadily from about 4 percent in 2000 to 9 percent in 2025 and 10 percent in 2030 (see Table 9).

As shown in Table 10, the decline in rural mountain populations is consistent across all continents and nearly all subregions. In contrast, the growth of mountain populations in towns, semi-dense areas and cities is more uneven. While Africa and Oceania exhibit faster mountain population growth in towns and semi-dense areas than in cities, the opposite trend is observed in the Americas and Asia, where cities are experiencing a more rapid increase in mountain populations than smaller urban areas. This trend is particularly evident in Africa, where mountain populations in towns and semi-dense areas are expected to grow by 83 million people – nearly double the projected increase of 42 million in cities (see Table 12).

Figure 8 offers a visual representation of the data presented in Table 10.

Table 9. Mountain population by rural areas/towns/cities divided by region in 2000, 2020, 2025 and 2030 (percentage)

Region	Rural areas				Towns and semi-dense areas				Cities			
	2000	2020	2025	2030	2000	2020	2025	2030	2000	2020	2025	2030
Africa	44.56	38.71	35.64	33.36	33.05	38.44	40.99	42.26	22.39	22.85	23.36	24.38
Eastern Africa	47.01	40.65	36.49	33.58	33.46	43.31	47.10	48.84	19.53	16.04	16.41	17.58
Middle Africa	32.94	28.74	27.65	26.29	27.30	25.61	25.77	26.04	39.76	45.64	46.58	47.67
Northern Africa	40.96	34.92	33.61	32.81	35.80	35.52	36.06	35.98	23.24	29.55	30.33	31.21
Southern Africa	47.34	42.63	41.77	41.08	35.50	32.38	31.68	31.65	17.16	24.99	26.55	27.27
Western Africa	45.74	40.38	39.22	38.01	28.56	26.50	27.43	27.98	25.70	33.12	33.34	34.01
Americas	34.57	30.33	29.65	29.08	24.44	24.35	24.57	24.41	40.99	45.32	45.78	46.51
Caribbean	55.94	45.42	42.88	40.41	36.23	45.94	49.17	52.45	7.83	8.65	7.95	7.13
Central America	33.81	31.69	30.85	30.30	25.90	28.00	28.88	28.98	40.28	40.31	40.26	40.72
Northern America	48.20	40.47	40.26	40.13	32.23	29.11	28.65	28.08	19.57	30.43	31.09	31.79
South America	31.31	26.36	25.77	25.17	21.22	19.44	19.05	18.54	47.47	54.20	55.19	56.29
Asia	38.66	33.57	32.50	31.72	37.25	37.02	37.03	36.71	24.09	29.41	30.47	31.57
Central Asia	29.69	26.05	25.28	24.56	49.03	44.46	43.34	42.01	21.28	29.49	31.38	33.43
Eastern Asia	40.50	38.11	38.06	38.21	40.89	40.01	39.36	39.08	18.62	21.88	22.59	22.71
South-Eastern Asia	36.88	33.56	32.51	31.65	33.21	35.56	36.84	36.97	29.90	30.89	30.66	31.38
Southern Asia	39.55	32.02	29.91	28.48	33.47	36.74	38.01	38.10	26.98	31.24	32.08	33.42
Western Asia	33.24	24.66	23.64	22.80	31.33	28.35	27.69	26.87	35.43	46.99	48.67	50.33
Europe	51.87	49.83	49.70	49.71	34.26	34.82	34.55	34.33	13.87	15.36	15.75	15.97
Eastern Europe	46.78	46.31	46.16	46.48	34.40	35.40	36.00	35.67	18.82	18.28	17.84	17.85
Northern Europe	74.74	73.75	73.30	73.61	23.33	23.09	23.46	22.99	1.94	3.15	3.24	3.41
Southern Europe	54.81	52.62	52.85	53.02	33.50	33.50	32.74	32.38	11.69	13.88	14.41	14.60
Western Europe	52.34	49.02	48.59	48.21	35.44	36.15	35.63	35.61	12.23	14.83	15.77	16.18
Oceania	77.60	56.50	52.27	48.81	18.18	37.24	39.07	41.36	4.22	6.26	8.66	9.83
Australia and New Zealand	64.70	60.86	60.53	60.10	27.97	28.26	28.45	28.76	7.33	10.89	11.01	11.14
Melanesia	80.15	55.91	51.28	47.56	16.20	38.37	40.30	42.71	3.64	5.72	8.43	9.73
Micronesia	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Polynesia	71.34	76.54	76.21	76.10	28.66	23.46	23.79	23.90	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
World	40.22	35.32	33.88	32.76	33.89	35.01	35.75	35.99	25.89	29.67	30.37	31.26

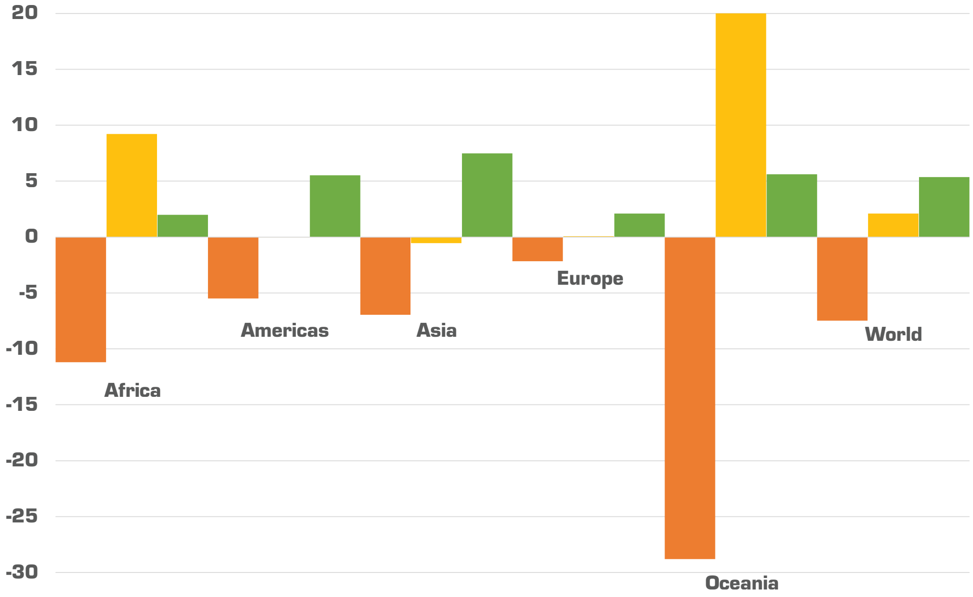
Source: Author's own elaboration.

Table 10. Mountain population change by rural areas/towns/cities divided by region between 2000 and 2030 (percentage)

Region	Rural change (%)	Towns and semi-dense areas change (%)	Cities
	2000-2030	2000-2030	2000-2030
Africa	11.20	9.21	1.99
Eastern Africa	13.42	15.37	1.95
Middle Africa	6.65	1.26	7.91
Northern Africa	8.15	0.18	7.97
Southern Africa	6.26	3.85	10.11
Western Africa	7.73	0.58	8.31
Americas	5.49	0.03	5.52
Caribbean	15.53	16.22	0.70
Central America	3.51	3.08	0.43
Northern America	8.07	4.15	12.22
South America	6.13	2.68	8.82
Asia	6.94	0.54	7.49
Central Asia	5.13	7.03	12.15
Eastern Asia	2.29	1.81	4.09
South-Eastern Asia	5.23	3.75	1.48
Southern Asia	11.07	4.63	6.44
Western Asia	10.44	4.46	14.90
Europe	2.17	0.07	2.10
Eastern Europe	0.30	1.26	0.96
Northern Europe	1.13	0.34	1.47
Southern Europe	1.79	1.12	2.91
Western Europe	4.13	0.17	3.96
Oceania	28.79	23.18	5.61
Australia and New Zealand	4.61	0.79	3.81
Melanesia	32.59	26.50	6.08
Micronesia	0.00	0.00	0.00
Polynesia	4.76	4.76	0.00
World	7.47	2.10	5.37

Source: Author’s own elaboration.

Figure 8. Mountain population change by rural areas/towns/cities divided by region between 2000 and 2030 (percentage)



Source: Author's own elaboration.

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Thimphu, Bhutan's capital city, nestled in the Thimphu Valley

Table 11. Mountain population by rural areas/towns/cities divided by region in 2000, 2020, 2025 and 2030 (absolute values)

Region	Rural areas - Total				Towns and semi-dense areas - Total				Cities - Total			
	2000	2020	2025	2030	2000	2020	2025	2030	2000	2020	2025	2030
Africa	77 221 442	105 062 969	107 566 213	111 119 241	57 287 663	104 327 032	123 718 365	140 784 896	38 803 852	62 027 084	70 506 407	81 211 214
Eastern Africa	47 230 188	69 364 887	70 270 102	72 335 227	33 622 122	73 908 368	90 700 957	105 187 792	19 626 551	27 376 211	31 593 053	37 869 570
Middle Africa	6 587 550	9 714 119	10 599 297	11 343 348	5 459 148	8 656 921	9 879 682	11 235 463	7 952 098	15 426 171	17 855 793	20 572 023
Northern Africa	9 410 440	10 170 025	10 356 684	10 566 274	8 226 425	10 344 843	11 110 645	11 587 610	5 339 979	8 605 832	9 343 854	10 050 070
Southern Africa	9 912 264	10 052 429	10 144 786	10 292 347	7 432 046	7 635 821	7 693 559	7 929 162	3 592 729	5 893 385	6 446 641	6 830 663
Western Africa	4 080 999	5 761 509	6 195 344	6 582 045	2 547 921	3 781 079	4 333 521	4 844 869	2 292 495	4 725 487	5 267 065	5 888 888
Americas	53 943 570	59 991 028	60 857 964	61 836 195	38 129 466	48 177 372	50 423 616	51 899 807	63 955 613	89 644 667	93 969 563	98 898 971
Caribbean	2 061 827	2 047 699	2 036 247	2 010 962	1 335 446	2 071 117	2 334 569	2 610 113	288 602	389 819	377 363	354 894
Central America	19 221 105	24 143 125	24 606 612	25 240 424	14 726 028	21 329 824	23 034 178	24 141 853	22 900 558	30 713 115	32 112 648	33 918 375
Northern America	7 884 261	8 397 004	8 618 456	8 800 979	5 271 628	6 039 694	6 131 733	6 158 560	3 200 173	6 313 830	6 655 404	6 972 196
South America	24 776 377	25 403 200	25 596 650	25 783 830	16 796 364	18 736 738	18 923 136	18 989 281	37 566 281	52 227 902	54 824 148	57 653 507
Asia	188 429 905	196 777 313	195 988 798	197 008 179	181 547 803	216 944 847	223 297 108	227 998 669	117 395 504	172 367 045	183 782 066	196 115 630
Central Asia	3 765 861	4 819 887	5 107 699	5 343 702	6 219 737	8 226 223	8 756 616	9 140 300	2 698 846	5 455 588	6 338 816	7 273 774
Eastern Asia	97 752 932	96 170 779	94 578 122	93 925 042	98 686 867	100 963 356	97 819 308	96 048 313	44 936 752	55 206 209	56 131 911	55 825 404
South-Eastern Asia	20 989 935	25 141 458	25 516 954	25 958 954	18 902 149	26 640 272	28 913 738	30 318 260	17 018 041	23 143 924	24 064 028	25 738 581
Southern Asia	45 686 626	49 535 158	49 173 927	49 516 337	38 668 160	56 844 248	62 483 553	66 251 713	31 171 198	48 341 592	52 743 602	58 120 054
Western Asia	20 234 551	21 110 031	21 612 097	22 264 144	19 070 890	24 270 748	25 323 893	26 240 083	21 570 667	40 219 732	44 503 709	49 157 817
Europe	35 032 266	33 828 696	33 407 172	32 989 465	23 137 083	23 637 077	23 219 788	22 781 389	9 364 395	10 425 847	10 585 287	10 598 345
Eastern Europe	9 265 640	8 951 965	8 867 164	8 800 876	6 814 638	6 843 417	6 913 992	6 754 159	3 727 423	3 533 650	3 426 898	3 380 749
Northern Europe	378 612	384 080	383 931	388 784	118 189	120 272	122 869	121 408	9 804	16 421	16 954	18 008
Southern Europe	14 990 736	13 792 708	13 440 502	13 096 560	9 163 631	8 780 977	8 325 615	8 000 052	3 198 397	3 638 724	3 663 469	3 606 804
Western Europe	10 397 279	10 699 943	10 715 575	10 703 245	7 040 625	7 892 410	7 857 313	7 905 770	2 428 770	3 237 051	3 477 965	3 592 784
Oceania	2 202 151	2 898 414	2 973 261	3 037 805	515 787	1 910 486	2 222 715	2 574 110	119 896	321 015	492 762	612 028
Australia and New Zealand	298 668	335 085	342 904	348 947	129 109	155 583	161 177	167 015	33 831	59 934	62 384	64 684
Melanesia	1 893 945	2 552 025	2 618 579	2 676 372	382 905	1 751 465	2 057 886	2 403 197	86 065	261 081	430 378	547 343
Micronesia	145.6	82.9	78.7	72.3	-		-	-	-	-	-	-
Polynesia	9 393.1	11 220.8	11 699.2	12 413.8	3 773.0	3 438.5	3 652.2	3 897.9	-	-	-	-
World	356 829 334	398 558 420	400 793 408	405 990 885	300 617 801	394 996 814	422 881 592	446 038 871	229 639 260	334 785 658	359 336 085	387 436 188

Source: Author's own elaboration.

Table 12. Mountain population change by rural areas/towns/cities divided by region between 2000 and 2030 (absolute values)

Region	Rural change	Towns and semi-dense areas change	Cities change
	2000-2030	2000-2030	2000-2030
Africa	33 897 799	83 497 233	42 407 361
Eastern Africa	25 105 039	71 565 670	18 243 019
Middle Africa	4 755 798	5 776 315	12 619 925
Northern Africa	1 155 834	3 361 185	4 710 091
Southern Africa	380 082	497 116	3 237 934
Western Africa	2 501 046	2 296 947	3 596 392
Americas	7 892 624	13 770 341	34 943 358
Caribbean	50 865	1 274 667	66 292
Central America	6 019 319	9 415 825	11 017 817
Northern America	916 718	886 932	3 772 023
South America	1 007 452	2 192 917	20 087 225
Asia	8 578 274	46 450 867	78 720 127
Central Asia	1 577 841	2 920 563	4 574 928
Eastern Asia	3 827 890	2 638 554	10 888 652
South-Eastern Asia	4 969 019	11 416 112	8 720 540
Southern Asia	3 829 711	27 583 553	26 948 856
Western Asia	2 029 593	7 169 193	27 587 150
Europe	2 042 801	355 694	1 233 950
Eastern Europe	464 764	60 479	346 673
Northern Europe	10 172	3 219	8 203
Southern Europe	1 894 176	1 163 579	408 407
Western Europe	305 966	865 145	1 164 014
Oceania	835 654	2 058 323	492 131
Australia and New Zealand	50 279	37 905	30 853
Melanesia	782 427	2 020 293	461 279
Micronesia	73	0	0
Polynesia	3 021	125	0
World	49 161 550	145 421 070	157 796 928

Source: Author's own elaboration.

Mountain dweller sitting in front of the Himalayas, India

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Conclusion

Key findings

The global mountain population has grown steadily over the past two decades and is projected to continue rising, reaching 1 240 million people by 2030, even as the pace of growth is expected to slow. Between 2000 and 2015, the world's mountain population grew by 20 percent – surpassing the global growth rate of 18 percent during the same period. From 2015 to 2030, growth in mountain areas is expected to slow to 13 percent, remaining slightly above the global rate of 11 percent.

Significant regional disparities underpin this overall trajectory. Africa is home to the fastest-growing mountain population in both absolute and relative terms, accounting for more than half of the projected global increase between 2020 and 2030. By contrast, some subregions – notably Eastern Asia, Eastern Europe and Southern Europe – are expected to experience population declines in mountain areas over the 2000–2030 period.

Another defining trend is the increasing share of mountain populations residing in cities. While rural areas still host a substantial proportion of mountain dwellers, their relative share is steadily decreasing. This pattern of urbanization is observed across all regions and reflects broader demographic shifts. Small towns and semi-dense areas are playing an increasingly central role in the trend – particularly in low- and middle-income countries.

Outlook and recommendations

The evidence of continued and projected population growth in mountain areas in most regions of the world is of specific relevance for policymaking. More people living in and around fragile mountain ecosystems will demand increased attention and recognition of their vulnerability at global, regional and national scales.

Increased pressure on mountain biodiversity, potential increased pollution and ecosystem degradation, disruption of traditional agrifood systems and exposure of an increasingly large number of people to climate-induced hazards such as landslides, flashfloods, droughts and fires are some of the challenges requiring urgent attention by governments and the international community. Policies should also focus on urban planning and the management of unplanned settlements to ensure that new developments are not built in areas prone to disasters and natural hazards. Moreover, in view of the increasing frequency and intensity of hazards in mountain areas, policies should promote climate-resilient infrastructure. Policymakers are also encouraged, as highlighted in the latest United Nations Secretary-General (UNSG) report on sustainable mountain development, to prioritize actions that support both mountain livelihoods and biodiversity, while also reducing disaster risk.

The trend towards a greater share of mountain population living in urban settings will be an important consideration for future policymaking. In several regions, small and intermediary urban centres in mountain areas already support surrounding populations that are larger than major cities and act as crucial links between rural and urban systems.

Proximity to available services and increased connectivity could improve the historically low food security status of mountain populations, by reducing their isolation and increasing their coping capacities. Studies on food security in urban mountain areas are needed to better understand this specific population's vulnerability to food insecurity. Moreover, future work would benefit from a further breakdown of population estimates by additional demographic variables such as age and sex (Thornton *et al*., 2022).

Increased urbanization in mountain areas also has potential negative implications for sustainable urban and mountain development. Given the constant growth of the mountain population and the inherent constraints of mountain topography, inadequate environmental protection and ineffective management strategies could lead to increasingly negative impacts being generated by mountain communities on these highly valuable environments and ecosystems (Thornton *et al*., 2022).

Further analysis at the subregional level would provide valuable insights into localized demographic trends and the specific dynamics driving growth or decline in mountain areas. The *Special Report on Climate Change and Cities* under the IPCC Seventh Assessment Report (AR7) cycle to be published in March 2027 will provide scientific information about solutions to minimize climate impacts and risks in urban areas to support policy development.[11]

Mobility dynamics, including pastoralism, seasonal migration and displacement triggered by environmental and economic pressures will continue to shape demographic patterns in mountain areas. In mountain societies, mobility remains both a coping mechanism and a catalyst for transformation. Recognizing and integrating these patterns into development planning is key to building adaptive capacity and resilience and supporting sustainable livelihoods (IOM and Mountain Partnership, 2024).

Finally, this study supports the recommendations of the latest UNSG report on sustainable mountain development by increasing available data on mountain-specific issues, promoting the sharing of data and knowledge and improving the availability and accessibility of disaggregated data for mountain regions.

To further support these efforts, FAO welcomes collaboration with other organizations to expand the work and encourages expressions of interest for joint research or publications on mountain populations' vulnerability to food insecurity.

Data limitations and future work

Despite the valuable insights presented in this brief, limitations in data availability constrain more detailed analysis at national and subnational levels. Specifically, the GHS population model may underestimate populations in densely populated areas and overestimate them in sparsely populated areas in some parts of the world. Inaccuracies may also derive from assumptions about the population distribution within built-up areas, which may not always reflect reality. In addition, rapid changes in population dynamics are not well captured by the datasets. There is a pressing need for more granular, georeferenced demographic data to enable mountain-specific assessments and targeted policy responses.

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[11] For more information, see: https://www.ipcc.ch/assessment-report/ar7/

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Annex 1 – Country grouping scheme

Geographical region and composition	Geographical region and composition of each region
World	
Africa	
Eastern Africa	British Indian Ocean Territory
	Burundi
	Comoros
	Djibouti
	Eritrea
	Eswatini
	Ethiopia
	Kenya
	Lesotho
	Madagascar
	Malawi
	Mauritius
	Mayotte
	Mozambique
	Rwanda
	Réunion
	Seychelles
	Somalia
	South Sudan
	Tanzania, United Republic of
	Uganda
	Zambia
	Zimbabwe
Middle Africa	Angola
	Cameroon
	Central African Republic
	Chad
	Congo
	Congo, Democratic Republic of the
	Equatorial Guinea
	Gabon
	Sao Tome and Principe

Northern Africa	Algeria
	Egypt
	Libya
	Morocco
	Sudan
	Tunisia
	Western Sahara
Southern Africa	Botswana
	Namibia
	South Africa
Western Africa	Benin
	Burkina Faso
	Cabo Verde
	Côte d’Ivoire
	Gambia
	Ghana
	Guinea
	Guinea-Bissau
	Liberia
	Mali
	Mauritania
	Niger
	Nigeria
	Saint Helena
	Senegal
	Sierra Leone
	Togo

Americas	

Caribbean	Anguilla
	Antigua and Barbuda
	Aruba
	Bahamas
	Barbados
	Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba
	British Virgin Islands
	Cayman Islands
	Cuba
	Curaçao
	Dominica
	Dominican Republic
	Grenada
	Guadeloupe
	Haiti
	Jamaica

	Martinique
	Montserrat
	Puerto Rico
	Saint Barthélemy
	Saint Kitts and Nevis
	Saint Lucia
	Saint Martin (French part)
	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines
	Sint Maarten (Dutch part)
	Trinidad and Tobago
	Turks and Caicos Islands
	United States Virgin Islands
Central America	Belize
	Costa Rica
	El Salvador
	Guatemala
	Honduras
	Mexico
	Nicaragua
	Panama
Northern America	Bermuda
	Canada
	Greenland
	Saint Pierre and Miquelon
	United States of America
Southern America	Argentina
	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)
	Brazil
	Chile
	Colombia
	Ecuador
	Falkland Islands (Malvinas)
	French Guiana
	Guyana
	Paraguay
	Peru
	Suriname
	Uruguay
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)
Asia	
Central Asia	Kazakhstan
	Kyrgyzstan
	Tajikistan
	Turkmenistan
	Uzbekistan

Eastern Asia	China
	China, Hong Kong SAR
	China, Macao SAR
	Democratic People’s Republic of Korea
	Japan
	Mongolia
	Republic of Korea
	Taiwan, Province of China
South-Eastern Asia	Brunei Darussalam
	Cambodia
	Indonesia
	Lao People’s Democratic Republic
	Malaysia
	Myanmar
	Philippines
	Singapore
	Thailand
	Timor-Leste
	Viet Nam
Southern Asia	Afghanistan
	Bangladesh
	Bhutan
	India
	Iran (Islamic Republic of)
	Maldives
	Nepal
	Pakistan
	Sri Lanka
Western Asia	Armenia
	Azerbaijan
	Bahrain
	Cyprus
	Georgia
	Iraq
	Israel
	Jordan
	Kuwait
	Lebanon
	Oman
	Qatar
	Saudi Arabia
	State of Palestine
	Syrian Arab Republic
	Turkey
	United Arab Emirates
	Yemen

Europe	
Eastern Europe	Belarus
	Bulgaria
	Czechia
	Hungary
	Poland
	Republic of Moldova
	Romania
	Russian Federation
	Slovakia
	Ukraine
Northern Europe	Åland Islands
	Denmark
	Estonia
	Faroe Islands
	Finland
	Guernsey
	Iceland
	Ireland
	Isle of Man
	Jersey
	Latvia
	Lithuania
	Norway
	Sweden
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
Southern Europe	Albania
	Andorra
	Bosnia and Herzegovina
	Croatia
	Greece
	Holy See
	Italy
	Malta
	Montenegro
	North Macedonia
	Portugal
	San Marino
	Serbia
	Slovenia
	Spain

Western Europe	Austria
	Belgium
	France
	Germany
	Liechtenstein
	Luxembourg
	Monaco
	Netherlands
	Switzerland
Oceania	
Australia and New Zealand	
Melanesia	
Micronesia	
Polynesia	

Woman from the Bhotia tribe selling artisinal products in Mana village on the border of China and India

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This technical brief presents the most up-to-date global assessment of mountain population trends from 2000 to 2030. It offers revised estimates disaggregated by region, elevation and settlement type, filling a longstanding data gap using the UNEP-WCMC mountain classification adopted by the Mountain Partnership. The study shows that while the mountain population continues to grow, projected to reach 1.24 billion by 2030, the pace is slowing, with Africa emerging as the fastest growing region. Urbanization is reshaping mountain demographics, with mountain cities seeing the largest increase. These shifts highlight the need for inclusive territorial planning, climate-resilient investment and improved data to support sustainable mountain development. The findings aim to contribute to the implementation of the Five Years of Action for the Development of Mountain Regions (2023–2027).

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Five Years of Action
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